

# Internal radiotherapy to the vagina

Information for patients



Leeds Cancer  
Centre

# This leaflet aims to help you and your family understand more about your internal radiotherapy (brachytherapy) for gynaecological cancer.

The treatment is given in the Brachytherapy Department, Rutherford Suite, Level -1 Bexley Wing. Brachytherapy uses a radioactive source. The source is placed close to the vaginal walls or near to the scar area in the vagina following surgery. The treatment area receives a high dose of radiation whilst the dose to surrounding normal tissue is lower.

The healthcare team looking after you will explain your treatment and the side-effects in detail. If you hear any words or phrases that you do not understand, please ask your doctor or a member of your healthcare team what it means. It does not matter how many times you ask.

## Vaginal vault treatment

A hollow cylinder called a vaginal cylinder, an example of one of these is shown in the picture below. It is inserted with the rounded end first, into the vagina. The cylinder is held in place by a small clamp, which does not touch you. The treatment is given as an outpatient and does not require an anaesthetic. It is used mainly in the treatment of cancer of the endometrium (the lining of the uterus or womb) or vagina.



## Will this be the only treatment I receive?

This treatment is sometimes given after external beam radiotherapy but can be used as the only treatment.

## What does the treatment involve?

Brachytherapy treatment is usually given in 3-6 treatments (fractions) daily, Monday to Friday. In some cases we give this treatment twice a week. Whenever possible you will be treated at the time of day that suits you, but this cannot always be arranged or guaranteed. There may be occasions when you may have a longer stay in the department or be asked to attend at a different time, e.g. to see your oncologist.

If you are having external radiotherapy there may be a gap of a few days after finishing that treatment before you start your brachytherapy. The brachytherapy radiographers will arrange a time to meet you during your external radiotherapy to explain your brachytherapy treatment to you.

If you are only having brachytherapy, you will usually have six daily treatments. The doctor will discuss this with you at your clinic appointment.

You will see the doctor before starting your brachytherapy. You will be examined internally to decide which size cylinder to be used. On the first day of treatment the radiographer will place the cylinder in your vagina. There is no need to perform any further internal examinations during the treatment. Lubricating jelly will be used to make the examination and cylinder placement as comfortable as possible.

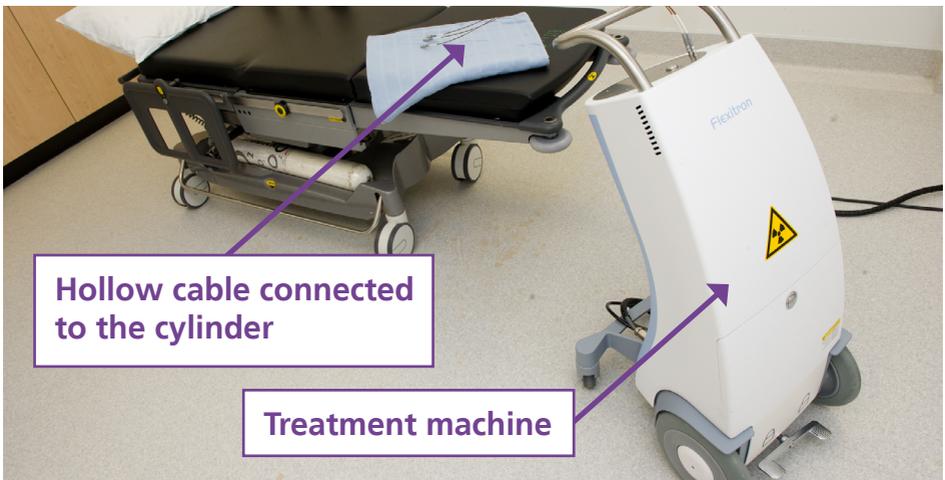
In some cases we may perform a CT or MRI scan with the tube in place. Your treatment may start a few days after this.

## During the treatment

A radiographer will show you to a changing room. You will be given a gown and asked to remove your clothes from the waist down. Your clothes and valuables can be locked away in a locker. You will keep the locker key with you until the treatment has finished.

You will be lying comfortably on a soft couch, whilst the treatment is taking place, shown in the photograph above. The cylinder is connected to the treatment machine using a hollow flexible cable. You may experience a little discomfort because you have a cylinder in the vagina. The cylinder is held in place with a small clamp which rests on the treatment couch. The muscles in the vagina may try to push the cylinder out, this sensation is perfectly normal.

Whilst the treatment is being given, you will be in the room alone but the brachytherapy radiographers will monitor you using a closed circuit TV. There is also a two-way intercom



system so the radiographers can talk to you and you can talk to them. There is also a radio and CD player, which you can listen to during your treatment.

When the machine is switched on, a radioactive pellet travels up the cylinder and gives the prescribed amount of radiotherapy to the vagina and then returns to the machine. The treatment itself is painless but you may notice a slight vibration as the pellet moves through the cylinder. This treatment will only take a few minutes.

## After the treatment

The radiographer removes the cylinder and you can wipe away any excess lubricating jelly. There is a sink to wash your hands in the room. You will be taken back to the changing room, where you can get dressed and go home.

## Side-effects

This treatment may cause slight bleeding but other symptoms are unusual. If you have also had external beam radiotherapy you may already be having some diarrhoea or urinary (wee) symptoms but this should not get any worse. If this is your only treatment, the side-effects should be minimal but may occur up to two weeks after treatment.

The side-effects you may experience are loose or more frequent bowel movements and a burning pain on passing urine. Drinking plenty of fluids can help to reduce this.

If these do not pass quickly or become severe, please contact our service (telephone number on the next page) for further advice.

Radiotherapy may cause dryness, loss of elasticity and narrowing of the vagina. You may be able to help to reduce this by using a vaginal dilator after treatment has finished. The brachytherapy radiographer will discuss this further during your treatment. There is also a leaflet '*Vaginal Care after pelvic radiotherapy*' to explain how to use the dilators.

## When will I see the doctor again?

You will either have a follow up with the Oncology doctors or one of the brachytherapy radiographers for a telephone review.

## Hotel Bexley Wing

The hotel is located on the 8th floor of Bexley wing and offers single and double rooms each with an en-suite, tea and coffee making facilities and digital television. Single rooms with wheel chair access are also available. 23 Patients are able to stay free of charge. There is a charge for relatives if they are staying in their own room. For further details please contact the Hotel Co-ordinator on **0113 206 7687**. Out of hours please contact the Non-surgical Oncology Nurse Practitioner through main switch board on **0113 243 3144**.

Car Parking Parking for radiotherapy planning and treatment is free. On entering the car park take a ticket and park as usual (disabled parking spaces are on Level 0). When exiting use the left hand lane next to the ticket office. Take your parking ticket and appointment letter to the attendant. They will process your ticket so that when you insert it at the barrier no charge will be made. If you need assistance or are unable to leave your car please press the button on the barrier.

## Student radiographers

The radiotherapy department is a training centre for therapeutic radiographers of any gender. They are supervised at all times. If you do not wish students to be present, please speak to a member of staff. This will not affect your treatment or care.

## Contact numbers

### Brachytherapy Radiographers

0113 206 7744 Monday to Friday 8.00am - 6.00pm

## Support Services

### Leeds Cancer Support

Leeds Cancer Support complements care provided by your clinical team. We offer access to information and a wide range of support, in a welcoming environment for you, your family and friends.

We can be found in the information lounges in Bexley Wing and also in the purpose built Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre.

### The Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre

This centre offers a variety of free health & wellbeing and supportive therapies for patients, their family members, and carers. These include hypnotherapy, mindfulness coaching, acupuncture (for hot flushes) and pilates.

### Live Through This

A cancer support and advocacy charity for the LGBTIQ+ community.

**Email:** [contact@livethroughthis.co.uk](mailto:contact@livethroughthis.co.uk)

**Website:** <https://livethroughthis.co.uk>

## Stopping smoking

NHS Free Smoking Helpline: **0300 123 1044** Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, Saturday and Sunday 11am to 5pm.

**Website:** [www.nhs.uk/smokefree](http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree)

## Maggie's Centre

If you or someone you love has cancer you may have lots of questions. Maggie's is a warm, welcoming place where you can meet people who are experiencing similar things to you. You may also be able to find support groups specific to your needs and get advice and information from their professional staff.

You don't need an appointment and all support is free.

Open Monday to Friday 9.00 am - 5.00pm. Tel: **(0113) 457 8364**

**Address:** St James's Hospital (next to the multi storey car park), Alma Street, Leeds LS9 7BE.

**Email:** [leeds@maggiescentres.org](mailto:leeds@maggiescentres.org)

**Website:** [www.maggiescentre.org](http://www.maggiescentre.org)

## National Support Organisations

### Macmillan Cancer Support

Freephone: **0808 808 0000**, 8.00am to 8.00pm seven days a week.

A textphone service for deaf and hard of hearing people is also available. Textphone: **18001 0808 808 0000**

**Website:** [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

**What did you think of your care? Visit [bit.ly/nhsleedsfft](https://bit.ly/nhsleedsfft)**  
*Your views matter*

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